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## THE STATE'S BEST POLICY.

(From the Rambler, for June.)

It is necessary to preface the remarks we are about to offer with a definition of the sense in which we apply the term "Protestant" to the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

We call it a "Protestant Government" merely for the convenience of the phrase, and because, as a matter of fact, its members are nearly all Protestants. So far as the Government and the Legislature are to be taken as representing the nation, we repudiate and protest against the term "Protestant." We are not a Protestant people; of mixed religions. The law of the land recognises a perfect equality between the various divisions who bear the Christian name, with the sole exception of excluding Catholics from the throne and the woolsack. To call us a Protestant nation is a misnomer, a falsification of fact, an insult, and a trick. It is the embodiment of the abominable notion that Catholics have not equal rights with other Englishmen. It is the cunning re-assertion of the old falsehood, that a man in becoming a Catholic ceases to belong to the British or Irish nation. It assumes that we exist on the soil, hold property, and exercise legislative and other functions, by virtue of some special immunity, granted us by the magnanimous toleration of those who alone are entitled to sway the destinies of the kingdom. As such we condemn, we denounce, we utterly reject the appellation. We assert that every right which belongs to a Protestant belongs by all laws of justice to a Catholic also. When we apply the term to the English Parliament and Ministry, we do nothing more than admit the fact, that the chances of the game of life have thrown the dominant power of the country into the hands of those who, whatever else they may be, are not Catholics. When the Whigs are in office, the Tories do not admit that England is a Whig nation; nor do the Whigs permit the Tories to put forth any similar claim in their own behalf. We Catholics are practically out of office; we have to extort our just claims through fear or persuasion, when we ought to have nothing to do but to state our case as equals with our fellow-citizens. But we do this under protest that we are iniquitously treated. We declare that we have as good a right to be masters in our own transactions as the haughtiest and most powerful of the dominant sects who agree only in leaguering together against us.

Further, we protest against and repudiate the accusations brought against us of being "subjects of a foreign prince," and consequently unable to feel as other Englishmen, and unfitted to share the power of those whose allegiance to the laws is whole-hearted and sincere. We deny the imputation that our faith is an anti-national faith. We declare that the charge of disloyalty conveyed in the phrase "subjects of a foreign prince" is founded on a fallacious interpretation of those words, invented by craft and propagated by malice. We are not subjects of the Pope as the Sovereign of an Italian state, but purely as a spiritual guide. We neither owe nor pay any allegiance whatsoever to any Italian government, or to any human laws whatsoever, except those of our own country. Catholicism is not more antagonistic to the decrees of a British Parliament than any other religion whose adherents believe that where the laws of God clash with the laws of men, the former are to be obeyed at all costs. We are not prepared to render a slavish, passive, absolute obedience to the dictates of the secular power, because we hold that the Christian revelation comes direct from God, and that the secular power may enjoin conduct inconsistent with the supreme authority of the revealed word of God.

What man calling himself a Christian does not hold the same? What Anglican, what Presbyterian, what Dissenter, is prepared to profess a rule of conduct different from this? Nay, what infidel, who does not go the extreme length of alleging that there exists no distinction whatever between virtue and vice, would admit that in every possible contingency he would render a complete obedience to the laws of the land? True, the Pope is an Italian; and moreover, he is the sovereign of a small independent kingdom. But this is an accident; the Pope might be an Englishman, and his secular sovereignty is no necessary appendage to his spiritual supremacy. We obey him as the Head of the Christian Church, and in that capacity only. If by any possibility his commands are in antagonism with an English act of Parliament, it is only because Christianity is sometimes in conflict with the regulations of men, whose aim is purely earthly in its character.

Probably, if human life, in its temporal and eternal relationships, had been fashioned by a mortal intelligence, the possibility of this hostility between the authority of law and the dictates of the gospel would have been guarded against. If man had the making of the universe, we may rest assured, that it

would have been a very different universe from what it now is. From the number of fingers on our hands and the position of nose, mouth, and eyes in the face up to the constitution of the Christian Church, every thing would have been marvellously better than it is in that strange world which Infinite Wisdom has created. Not the least of the "improvements" would have been the prevention of these conflicts between the Church and the State. We should never have witnessed the anomaly of a revelation forbidding in some instances that obedience to "the powers that be," which has a rule, and in the most positive terms, it actually enjoins. Such troublesome affairs as apparently conflicting duties would have been unknown in this world of harmony and peace, and the "laws of the land" would have been, by a peculiar dispensation of Providence, in strictest union with the dictates of the gospel.

As a fact, nevertheless, this is not the case. No gift of infallibility has been conferred on the Sovereign and Legislature of England or of any other nation under the sun. Consequently, no man who believes in God and in Christianity can bind himself to an unreserved obedience to the laws of his country.

This, then, we hold to be the primary duty of every English legislator and every minister of the Crown—to recognise the indefeasible rights of conscience in every human being not an absolute atheist. We speak, of course, of legislators and ministers who are not atheists themselves; who either have a conscience, or who profess to have a conscience, add to believe in Christianity, or who at the least in the power of conscience in other men. With such persons, the first element in their legislative speculations ought to be the admission of this one mighty element in human life,—the existence of a tribunal superior to that of any human judgment-seat. If you would govern your subjects, not as slaves but as men; if you would construct a political system which shall be self-supporting and command at once the respect and attachment of those without whose co-operation it can have no true vitality; if you would not do violence to every thing that is noblest, most enduring, most obedient, most worthy of cultivation, in the human beings whose destinies you would control,—make not a law, impose not a penalty, until you have once for all abdicated every claim to an undivided supremacy over the mind and heart of mankind. Galling as it may be the pride of monarchs, or governments, to accept a position inferior to that which another sovereign maintains invisibly in the souls of their subjects, the position must be accepted by every wise prince and legislature. The powers of God have not been delegated either to king or statesman; and the king or statesman who disdains to sway any power but that against which there is no appeal, will find himself incessantly in conflict with the people whom he desires to rule like a god.

Asserting, then, our resolution to resign the rights of conscience to no earthly power, we repudiate the accusation that in so doing we stand apart from the rest of our fellow-countrymen, and lose our title to be regarded as loyal subjects. All that men dare render, we are ready to yield. We claim no more than every man claims, who knows that there is a God and a judgment to come. We assert our rights to follow the rules of our own religion; and we declare that every government which attempts to wrest those rights from us is a traitor to that higher Power which gives to rulers their jurisdiction, and to laws their binding force upon the conscience. That jurisdiction and those laws we admit to be, in a certain sense divine in their authority. Society and government are not a mere human device or institution. God, who made man a social being, Himself set up law and government, and made rulers His vicegerents upon earth. Believing, accordingly, in God, we obey the laws of the land; not only from fear, or as a matter of interest, but in order thereby to please Almighty God Himself. But when those who make or administer laws fly in the very face of that authority which gives them their title to our obedience obedience ceases to be their due. Laws made against Christianity are not laws, but the caprices of tyrants. If the ministry and legislature of this country, therefore, are what they profess to be, Christian in their principles and honorable in their intentions, they will not permit their judgment to be warped by the circumstance that we Catholics entertain different ideas from themselves as to what is Christianity. If they are really able to have done with bigotry, narrow-mindedness, and shallow spite, they will address themselves to the great work of governing the Catholic population of the empire on a basis which recognises in the fullest sense our rights of conscience as Christians who have a Master in heaven whom we are determined to obey.

Unhappily, in this and every age, alike in Protestant and Catholic states, it is seldom that statesmen can be brought to view the question in this rational

and Christian light. They will not be content with the position assigned them by the God of nations.—They are beset with a temptation to arrogate to themselves a power to which they have no just claim. They insist upon stigmatising as rebellious and disloyal every subject who rejects their supremacy in things spiritual; or, when driven from this monstrous pretence, they take refuge in the abominable theory, that it is the part of a wise and prudent government to rule its people through their passions and their infirmities, and not through their virtues and their conscience. Kings have rarely had but one maxim—*Divide et impera*. One religious sect is to be played off against another sect. Men who, united, would not submit to violations of their conscientious scruples, are to be managed by means of their mutual jealousies. Traitors to their own principles are found to be the readiest instruments in forwarding the designs of those who would rule a people with a rod of iron.

And nowhere has this Machiavellian policy thriven more successfully than in our own country. The innumerable diversities of opinion in all matters, religious and otherwise, which prevail in the British and Irish races, is an irresistible weapon in the hands of a crafty government, whose sole object is to retain its own power, and keep its subjects in peace. An English minister must be simple indeed, who, with Catholic and Protestant, Establishmentarian and Dissenter, Methodist and Socinian, Irvingite and Mormonite, Jew and Atheist, all spread out before him like chessmen on a board, cannot contrive to wheedle so multifarious a generation into interminable divisions, suspicions, and quarrels, rendering them as a whole most perfectly subservient to his own schemes. It is only the most infatuated Tory, or the lowest Puritan, or a Premier in a transitory passion; who can be at a loss for resources, with such a chaos of elements as the imperial kingdom presents ready to his hands for cunning organisation. Brains, temper, disregard of religion and carelessness for men's souls, are all that is necessary to give a British government an almost endless lease of power over such a people as this.

One only difficulty stands in the way of our rulers. The Catholic population is far more puzzling than any Protestant denomination. All the devices of diplomacy are needed for the management of us Papists. We are thorns in the side of a minister, clever and unscrupulous though he be. Against Protestants his resources are ample. With an annual revenue of many millions, and all the honors which the world can bestow, the Establishment, shout and declaim as it may, is the most amiable of domestic servants. It may roar like a lion, but it will lie down like a lamb. With more than ten thousand snug vicarages and rectories, with acres of glebe without end, with Oxford and Cambridge for all its exclusive enjoyment, with six-and-twenty bishops in the House of Lords, besides "perquisites" enough to make the coldest expectant's mouth water,—what Premier can feel a moment's uneasiness respecting the mode of controlling so sleek and well-fed a member of the national household?

The Nonconformists, too, what are they? As a class of men, shopkeepers. Who could not keep the peace with a race of "bourgeois"? Tax them moderately; permit them ample indulgence of the tongue; spare them an occasional word of flattery; throw them a stray lord or so now and then, to go to their meetings and tolerate their unctuous adulation; and lo! they straightway subside into the mildest of remonstrants; their consciences prove sufficiently elastic for all practical purposes; and as fast as they make fortunes in business, they quietly drop off from the dissenting branches, and are grafted into the sheltering and gentlemanly Establishment. Oh! what simple politicians were they who tormented the elder Puritans, and drove the "Pilgrim Fathers" to the New World! What a satire on a "government" was that which threw the reins of power into the grasp of Cromwell and his Ironsides! We know better than to cut off Nonconformist ears, long tho' they may be. We pour sweet nonsense into those willing receptacles, and the land is free from Prynnes, and Hampdens, and Bunyans.

But when all else are disposed of, the Papist remains. He has certain peculiarities which render him an awkward subject for ministerial manipulation. First of all he differs from all classes of Protestants in having one fixed, distinct, and perfectly well ascertained creed. Hence the government wedge cannot be introduced into any of those doctrinal creeds, which prove so convenient in the case of others. Without imputing any extraordinary or conscious insincerity to a Protestant, it is certain that a vague and undefined character of his opinions enables statesmen of very moderate ingenuity to devise subtle compromises, by which the Protestant conscience is reconciled to the parliamentary or judicial decree. A person whose creed is purely a matter of private

opinion is rarely so thoroughly of the same mind for two years together, as to have any decent pretence for setting his "views" in glaring opposition to a clear downright act of Parliament or magisterial sentence. Amid the endless fluctuations produced by the conflict of Thirty-nine Articles, Rubrics, Bishops' Charges, Biblical Criticism, Assembly's Catechism, Wesleyan Experiences, Evangelical Commentaries, Newspaper Articles, and Exeter-Hall Oration, opportunities for "statesmanlike" management occur in almost embarrassing profusion. With us, on the contrary, the Council of Trent, the Pope's Bulls, and sundry condemned Propositions besides, produce so decided a uniformity of faith, that it is hopeless for a government to try to divide us against one another on grounds of religious doctrine. Our faith of to-day will be our faith twenty years hence.

Further still, and worse still, we are, by our first principles, a compact, organised, and living body.—Protestant, however numerically formidable, have no corporate strength. They are a mere aggregate of individuals. We, on the contrary, are a Church.—Every blow struck at a single member sends a shock through the whole framework of which he is a portion. No man stands alone amongst us, and therefore no man can be injured without a proportionate suffering on the part of every fellow-Catholic in existence. Every person, moreover, having his own proper place and office in the organised whole, any interference with the fulfilment of his functions produces an instantaneous irritation and resistance in the universal body. No one can act alone. He must compromise, more or less, his superiors and his inferiors together. He cannot shake off his relation to his fellow-Catholics, and play into the hands of their opponents, without ceasing to be a Catholic, at least in spirit. Hence, a designing government cannot negotiate with, or practise upon, individual Catholics with the same facility as upon individual Protestants. It is not an easy matter to divide us in order to govern us. More or less, in some shape or other, the secular power is driven to recognise our spiritual authorities and the validity of our constitution. It is impossible, whatever acts of Parliament may say, to forget that a Catholic bishop is a real bishop, and that the sovereignty of the Pope is something different from the supremacy of the Queen.

In this dilemma, it is the usual practice with governments to adopt a far more odious system with Catholics than they find necessary in their dealings with Protestants. The fundamental principle of Protestantism allowing of and sanctioning disunion, a man may be a very good specimen of a Protestant, though he stands absolutely alone in his views and conduct. Hence the secular power has no difficulty in finding most unexceptionable samples of Protestantism with whom to ally itself in its schemes for employing all religious sects as instruments for its own ends. If one man is stupid, obstinate, and pragmatical, another is at hand, at once respectable, accomplished and facile. The government accordingly, wise in his generation, pays its court to the best types of the Protestant schools and in their aid and service gathers new claims to the title of a Christian, an enlightened, a respectable power.

From amongst us, on the other hand, the system of rulers has generally been to fix upon the worst possible examples of Catholicism whom they could discover in our ranks. Whatever at least ultramontane, least spiritual, least anxious for the conversion of Protestants, least jealous of the encroachments of the world on the Church, least zealous for the honor of the episcopacy and priesthood—that is the Catholicism through which English ministries have sought to carry out their aims in respect to the Catholics of the United Kingdom. We admit, undoubtedly, exceptions. We admit the perfect respectability, the personal piety of some individuals of all those who have attracted the eyes of ministers and parliaments. Here and there, further, we grant that they may have employed the services of thorough-going, undeniable, and utterly Popish men; who never for a moment suffered themselves to be hoodwinked, and would have sacrificed their lives rather than betrayed one iota of the independence of the Church. But, speaking generally, the English Government has sought its support in whom it well knew it would find not friends, but tools. That such must always exist amongst us, is a necessary result of the infirmities of human nature. Many things are sufficient to make a man a very questionable Catholic, without amounting to a ground for excommunication, and without reaching the extent of voluntary apostasy. And these are they who have been the favorites of our rulers, and who still are, by too many of them, accounted the fittest instruments for neutralising the power of Catholicism when it comes into contact with the temporal power.

For ourselves, we need not say that we regard such a system as hateful in the extreme. It is Mac-